

# ***Flying with Words: Creative Writing with your Students***

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- **CHARACTER**

- Each character should have his/her **distinct** way of seeing the world, talking (word choice, rhythm, sentence structure, etc), moving, expressing emotions.
- Use dialogue, specific details, and action to **show us, rather than tell us about**, the character.
- **Sensual, moment-to-moment narration** of characters' actions in **scene** is more powerful than summary.
- Each character, even minor ones, should be **three-dimensional**.

- **SETTING**

- Use as many **senses** as possible as often as possible.
- Pick out most interesting, **significant setting details**, especially the unusual and unexpected. Be **specific**.
- Let each setting description serve **multiple purposes**—to illustrate themes, incorporate imagery, show thoughts, create a mood, foreshadow events, develop character and voice, etc.

- **PLOT**

- Basically, plot is: the problem, the obstacles to overcome, and solution.
- Set up the main character's conscious and unconscious **wants/needs**. Know their character arc (change, growth).
- The **obstacles** they face relate connect the plot and character arc.
- Make sure your character is **actively** trying to reach their goal.

- **IMAGERY (Figurative Language)**

- Imagery emerges as part of a deep, dreamlike process that happens in the “poetry part” of yourself. It takes the form of metaphor, simile, symbol, motif. It speaks to readers on a subconscious level, and can deeply touch their emotions. During your very early drafts and notes, do you notice any reappearing or striking images? Are they associated with particular characters? How do they relate to the theme? How can you **bring this imagery into relief** in later drafts?

# FUN PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES

These are great pre-writing activities for fiction and non-fiction narrative pieces. (You can also use these at any time during the writing and revision process.) Tell students not to worry about spelling, grammar, hand-writing, etc. during this brain-storming stage. You might want to use a timer to get their creative energy flowing quickly.

- **SETTING Writing Exercises**

- **Pick a smell** that reminds you of your story (from your imagination or from spice jars, food, plants, etc). Close your eyes and let yourself smell it. Let the smell lead you (as your character) into a scene. Now, what do you hear, feel, taste, and finally, see?
- **Multi-sensory scene:** Think of a scene from your story (or use a mag pic for inspiration). Write it using all the senses, focusing on the often-neglected senses like smell, taste, sound, and touch.
- **Setting and Mood:** Pick a setting (from your story or from a mag pic). Imagine you (as your main character) are in an exuberantly happy mood. Describe the setting, making sure to use some metaphors/similes. Now, imagine you (as your main character) are feeling extremely angry. Describe the same setting, using different language and metaphors/similes.

- **CHARACTER Writing Exercises**

- **Interviewing a Character:** Pick a character from your story. Ask him to tell you:
  - About his earliest memory.
  - About the scariest thing that happened to him. About the happiest day of his life.
  - About what he thinks about when he wakes up at three a.m. and can't get back to sleep.
  - What his perfect meal would be.
- **Character Study:** Pick a character from your story (or, if you don't have a story, use a mag pic for inspiration).
  - What food or spice or beverage would she/he be?
  - Compare her to a kind of machine or season or time of day or vehicle.
  - What are some surprising hobbies he/she has? Musical taste? Quirks?
  - How does she talk and move? (fast/slow, verbose/terse, sassy/earnest)

- **PLOT Writing Exercises:**

- *Make a graphic organizer (table, chart, graph) or use notecards to see how your story fits into the basic stages of the hero's journey. (See The Writer's Journey by C. Vogler)*
  - *Set up "world" and problem/want/need*
  - *Call to adventure*
  - *Debating the call*
  - *Crossing the threshold*
  - *Meeting the mentor*
  - *Facing challenges*
  - *Climax (ultimate challenge)*
  - *Getting the "treasure"*
  - *Returning to regular world with treasure*
  - *Showing how character has grown/changed*

- **IMAGERY Writing Exercises:**

- **Random Word Poetry:** *Pick ten random words from a book. (Close your eyes and point.) Write stream-of-consciousness poetry. The only rules are that you have to use all ten words and you need to write without censoring yourself within a short time limit. Afterward, notice what images and themes emerged in your poem. Try to use them in your story.*
- **Special Object Poetry:** *Find or imagine an object that you associate with the story. Touch it, smell it, stare at it. Ask the object to lead you into your story. Write stream-of-consciousness poetry (perhaps from the POV of the object), letting it take you deeper into your story. Give yourself a short time limit. Afterward, notice what images and themes emerged in your poem. Incorporate this into your story.*

## REVISION AND FEEDBACK TIPS:

- **Be specific and positive.** When students are giving each other feedback, they should be instructed to first name three specific things they loved about their partner's piece. Then, they should move on to specific problems with the piece. They might do several rounds of revision, with each round focusing on different specific aspects. For example, maybe one round of revision focuses on plot, character, setting, and imagery. Maybe the next round focuses on sentence structure, word choice, and spelling. Always begin and end a feedback session with the positives!
- **Revision IS writing!** Explain to students that all published authors do MANY revisions and critique sessions. For my first book, I did about 25 revisions over five years based on feedback from my writing group. Now, eight books later, I still do at least ten revisions per book with my writing group. I actually *like* revising because I know I don't have to get it perfect the first time. (Or the second, or third, or fourth...) It takes the pressure off!